

THE NATION

a handle on how the President's dog-and-pony show has been doing," says a senior House Republican. "There's a general feeling that the President's position has stabilized, but nobody knows." Republicans wish that their President would somehow leave office with the least possible commotion. A conservative G.O.P. Senator admits that he would hate to see the President resign "because it would set a bad precedent. But it certainly would be good for the Republican Party." There is, of course, an irony in all this that is not lost on many Republican leaders. It was, after all, Richard Nixon who separated himself from the party to enhance his majority in 1972.

HISTORICAL NOTES

Giving Them More Hell

While in the White House, Harry Truman once wrote to a music critic who had snickered at Daughter Margaret's singing that the fellow would be needing a jockstrap if they ever met. Now it turns out that advancing age and tranquil retirement in Independence, Mo., did nothing to sweeten the tongue or soften the wrath of the 33rd President of the United States. In a book appropriately titled *Plain Speaking*, to be published in February (G.P. Putnam's Sons), Truman displays all of his oldtime fire.

The book came out of a long series of conversations that Truman, then 77, had in 1961 and early 1962 with Novelist and Journalist Merle Miller during the preparation of a television series. The TV project did not pan out, but Miller, who has become a Gay Lib crusader in recent years, filed away his tapes and extensive notes of the talks. He explains that he just did not get around to doing anything with them until after Truman's death last December at the age of 88. Miller admits to never having told the former President about his plans to turn

their conversations into a book eventually, but adds: "I think he suspected I'd write it up some day. He was thinking about his place in history." From Miller's interviews, some of Harry Truman's blunt thoughts about the men who shared his times:

DOUGLAS MacARTHUR. Truman dismissed MacArthur as Supreme Commander in Korea for publicly criticizing Administration policy against expanding the war. "I fired him because he wouldn't respect the authority of the President. I didn't fire him because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the law for generals. If it was, half to three-quarters of them would be in jail."

As for MacArthur's attempts to conduct his own grandiose foreign policy in the Pacific, Truman said: "I've given that a lot of thought and finally decided that there were times when he wasn't right in his head. And there was never anybody around him to keep him in line. He didn't have anyone on his staff who wasn't an ass kisser. Why, hell, if he'd had his way, he'd have had us in the Third World War and blown up two-thirds of the world."

DWIGHT EISENHOWER. Truman claimed that Ike was a "weak" commander during World War II, and that later he was a "coward" for not censuring Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy during his witch hunts for Reds in the Government. But what really ticked Truman off was a letter that he said Ike wrote General George Marshall, the Army's Chief of Staff, after the war asking to be relieved of duty so that he could divorce his wife Mamie and marry Kay Summersby, a British WAC who doubled as his driver and secretary during the campaign in Europe.

"Well," said Truman, "Marshall wrote him back a letter the like of which I never did see. He said that if Eisenhower even came close to doing such a thing, he'd not only bust him out of the Army, he'd see to it that never for the

rest of his life would he be able to draw a peaceful breath."

Then Truman added: "I don't like Eisenhower. I never have, but one of the last things I did as President, I got those letters from his file in the Pentagon and I destroyed them."

ADLAI STEVENSON. "He would never understand how you have to get along with people and be equal with them. . . . That fellow was too busy making up his mind whether he had to go to the bathroom or not. That fellow didn't know the first thing about campaigning [in 1952], and he didn't learn anything either. He got worse in 1956."

THE KENNEDYS. In 1960, when John Kennedy was running for the presidency, Truman recalled, it was not the Pope he was afraid of moving into the White House. It was the Pop. "Old Joe Kennedy is as big a crook as we've got anywhere in this country, and I don't like it that he bought his son the nomination for the presidency. He bought West Virginia. I don't know how much it cost him; he's a tightfisted old son of a bitch; so he didn't pay any more than he had to. But he bought West Virginia, and that's how his boy won the primary over Humphrey."

As for Robert Kennedy, Truman said: "I just don't like that boy, and I never will. He worked for old Joe McCarthy, you know. When old Joe was tearing up the Constitution and the country, that boy couldn't say enough for him."

RICHARD NIXON. Truman was especially incensed by Nixon's attacks years before on the character of General Marshall, a man whom the former President venerated. Admitting his hatred of Nixon, Truman said: "Nixon is a shift-eyed goddamn liar, and the people know it. I can't figure out how he came so close to getting elected in 1960." Later Truman noted: "They say Nixon has changed, but they'll have to prove it to me. Where that fella is concerned, you might say I'm from Missouri."

HARRY TRUMAN WITH RICHARD NIXON (1953), KAY SUMMERSBY (1947), TRUMAN WITH MacARTHUR (1951)

